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ABSTRACT

This monograph describes and illustrates the characteristics of middle grades students in terms of intellectual, physical, emotional, and social growth; discusses the characteristics of effective middle grades teachers; and explores the implications of teacher/learner research data for curriculum and instruction related to early adolescents (ages 10-14). Early adolescence is a period of major transitions: students learn new roles, deal with rapidly changing bodies, and experience new expectations. Middle grades teachers need a thorough knowledge of the human growth and development data pertinent to early adolescence, subject matter expertise, the ability to provide strong role models, and good classroom management skills. Diverse instructional strategies are needed for middle grades, strategies that aim to foster cognitive development and healthy personalities, and that reflect the search for identity characteristic of early adolescence. Forty-five references are given. (IAH)

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WHO THEY ARE - HOW WE TEACH

Early Adolescents and Their Teachers

by

C. Kenneth McEwin & Julia T. Thomason

National Middle School Association

nmsa

Drs. C. Kenneth McEwin and Julia Thomason are colleagues at Appalachian State University in Boone, North Carolina. They are also colleagues in the cause of early adolescent education with national reputations as leaders in the movement. Both are active in the National Middle School Association. Dr. McEwin served as Association President in 1982-83 and Dr. Thomason is the 1989-90 President.

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PREFACE

At one time there was a genuine scarcity of materials focusing on the developmental characteristics of early adolescents. Even less was available on recommended practices to accommodate these characteristics. Far too little attention had been paid to identifying desirable characteristics of middle grades teachers; and practices insuring quality curriculum and instruction were just becoming a significant part of the middle school literature. Today there is considerably more available.

Numerous research studies, detailed practical illustrations, and descriptions of existing middle grades programs are now much more common and accessible to middle grades practitioners. These resources contain diverse prospectives and appear under various headings in a variety of sources.

The purpose of this monograph is to collect in a comprehensive document some of the most significant information on early adolescence. Data presented support the philosophical positions advanced by the National Middle School Association in its publications and resolutions. Thi publication first describes and illustrates the characteristics of middle grades students in terms of intellectual, physical, emotional and social growth. The characteristics of effective middle grades teachers are then discussed. Finally, the implications of teacher/learner data for curriculum and instruction are explored.

C. Kenneth McEwin
Julia T. Thomason

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PART I

The Middle Grades Learner

Some of the most significant changes in life are experienced during early adolescence. Within a relatively short span, growth breakthroughs that establish the foundations upon which late adolescence and adulthood are structured take place. These years are at times difficult, as youth struggle to straddle the overlapping worlds of childhood and adolescence. The relative security of childhood is best known to them, yet they are drawn toward adolescence. They sometimes think and act as children,but to consider them so is a mistake. At other times they seem well on the way to maturity, but to consider them full-fledged adolescents is also a mistake. Early adolescents are experiencing major transitions -- learning new roles, dealing with rapidly changing bodies, and experiencing many new expectations from almost all segments of their world (Mitchell,1979). During this period twenty million 10 to 14 year olds experience major changes in physical, social, intellectual, and emotional development that are unparalleled in life, with the possible exception of the early days of infancy.

Early Adolescence

By viewing human development as a continuous process, it is evident that no clearly demarcated events characterize entrance into and exit from early adolescence. In recent years, however, increased attention has been focused on this middle years age group. Many names have been used to describe them (transescents, preadolescents, "in-between-agers," young adolescents, etc.), and there is no universal agreement on what ages should be included. Typically, however, those from 10 or 11 to 14 or 15 years of age are considered to be early adolescents (Thornburg, 1980b). It is widely recognized that overlap exists at both ends of these stated age ranges. However, the majority of these youth are found in grades five through eight.

Early adolescents have been largely neglected by researchers, educators, governmental agencies, youth serving agencies and other important groups and individuals in the past (Lipsitz, 1977; Thornburg, 1987). Fortunately, in recent years interest in the education and welfare of this age group has increased significantly. This interest has intensified for at least two major reasons. First is the recognition that there is a serious lack of specialized knowledge of this stage of development. A second major factor is a growing recognition of a widespread increase in problems being experienced by large numbers of early adolescents, e.g., increased pregnancy and suicide rates and tragic levels of illicit drug and alcohol use (Lipsitz, 1980; *Turning Points*, 1989).

The necessity of focusing more attention and effort on assisting these young people as they bid farewell to childhood and begin the sometimes difficult journey to adulthood should be recognized by all those responsible for their education and welfare. As noted by the Carnegie Council on Adolescent Development, "Young adolescents face significant turning points. For many youth 10 to 15 years old, early adolescence offers opportunities to choose a path toward a productive and fulfilling life. For many others, it represents their last best chance to avoid a diminished future" (*Turning Points*, p. 8). Middle level schools have a crucial role to play in assuring that all early adolescents have the opportunities they need and deserve to reach their full potential.

Statements regarding the unique developmental characteristics and needs of early adolescents tend to be quickly accepted. Few question the notion that these young people are experiencing dramatic and sometimes traumatic changes in physical, social/emotional and intellectual growth. In the majority of middle level schools, however, programs, practices and curriculum still fail to fully reflect the many implications of the knowledge base on early adolescence. In other words, the facts seem to be agreed with, but not always intellectually accepted and acted upon. Although significant progress is being made in many middle level schools, the traditional secondary model remains dominant in far too many middle level schools (George & Oldaker, 1985; Cawelti, 1989; Alexander & McEwin, 1989). This traditional pattern simply does not reflect the kind of developmentally responsive schooling needed so desperately by early adolescents.

It is still common to hear negative comments about 10 to 15 year olds. However, the community at large, and especially educators, can ill afford to continue to remain uninterested or even negative in their attitudes toward these young people. The myth that these years are necessarily characterized by a time of "storm and stress" feed these negative attitudes. However, many empirical investigators have found that for <u>most</u> early adolescents these years are not marked by undue amounts of stress and turmoil (Simmons & Blyth, 1987). Those who are more fully understanding and appreciative of this developmental age group think of them less in terms of agitation and trouble than in terms of excitement and discovery. It is during this time that "one begins to catch a glimpse of the emerging adult side by side with the child, when leadership begins to make itself visible, when the capacity for abstract thought develops, and when, perhaps for the first time, a parent or a teacher can hold a conversation with the young person that has the tone of adult to adult communication." (Benson, Williams & Johnson, 1987, p. 4).

A major weapon in helping others develop more positive attitudes toward early adolescents is the provision of accurate knowledge about them. The remainder of this section briefly addresses some of the major characteristics of early adolescents. It is not a comprehensive or exhaustive treatment of the topic,

but rather is included to serve as a reminder for those knowledgeable about early adolescence and as an introduction for those who have not had the opportunity to study this fascinating stage of human development.

Physical Development

Early adolescence is characterized by periods of pronounced and accelerated growth. This period involves the most rapid physical growth that humans experience with the exception of fetal and neonatal growth (Brooks-Gunn, 1987). Growth patterns do, however, differ greatly in timing and degree with some moving through this time of change rather slowly while others seem to change overnight. The growth spurt usually begins at about age 10 for girls and age 12 for boys (Ingersoll, 1989). Females mature at the rate of about one to two years earlier than males; but the sequential order in which development occurs is relatively consistent within each sex.

The age of greatest variability in physical size and physiological development is approximately 13. This rapid growth not only begins at different times but often is disproportionate since certain parts of the body such as the extremities develop earlier and more rapidly (Van Hoose & Strahan, 1988). This developmental reality not only often leads to awkwardness and unattractive physical appearance, it can also lead to serious physical injuries in contact sports programs (McEwin, 1981; Findley, 1987).

The age of developmental maturity has moved into the preteen years (Sommers, 1978; Thornburg, 1980a). The average age of the first menarche has declined an average of four months per decade for the past century (Tanner, 1972). Recent evidence, however, indicates that this trend has leveled off in Western, industrialized countries (Peterson, 1979; Thornburg & Thornburg, 1985). Regardless of future maturational trends, this phenomenon, when combined with other modern influences, has important implications for instruction and schooling.

The end results of this growth period differ greatly from person to person. Each individual establishes unique trademarks, idiosyncrasies, and peculiarities, while many commonalities, tendencies and needs also evolve (Mitchell, 1974). It is the responsibility of educators to learn more about these differences and commonalities and to use this knowledge wisely. No other period brings about such potential for social, emotional, and intellectual changes and the positive and negative results that frequently accompany them.

Intellectual Development

The intellectual changes occurring during early adolescence are not as easily observed as the physical ones. However, adjusting to a new way of thinking is a difficult task for these youth. Mental changes, which often precede physical ones, greatly affect the ways early adolescents adjust to physical changes. Elkind

(1984) notes that "...thinking on a higher level takes time to get used to. Teenagers need to become accustomed to living in a new body" (p. 24).

During early adolescence the vast majority of students are operating within Piaget's concrete and formal operational stages (Inhelder & Piaget, 1958). The concrete stage is a very conceptual one where information is organized around categories which are generalizable from one instance to another. The formal stage is characterized by formal thought and utilizes the components of logic and reasoning in decision making. This process is the beginning of the type of thought which exists in many adults (Thornburg, 1980b).

As early adolescents lose some of their dependence on what is perceived as reality, they begin to focus on what is possible -- propositional thinking. Some focus on the "here-and-now" while others develop the ability to deal with more advanced concepts. Moving toward this formal stage of thought enables some students to deal more readily with the possible and the abstract. They may begin to be able to grasp concepts such as calculus and philosophy and appreciate simile and parody (Elkind, 1984). Sometime during the early adolescent years, most early adolescents will be able to go beyond what might be and develop a higher degree of intellectual curiosity.

It should be fully realized, however, that the cognitive maturation of early adolescents is highly variable among individuals. For example, Toepfer reported that "The synthesis of available findings shows that no more than one percent of 10 year olds; five percent of 11 year olds; 12 percent of 12 year olds; 14 percent of 13 year olds; and 14 percent of 14 year olds have the capacity to even initiate formal operations" (Toepfer, 1980, p. 226). Further, studies of the development of formal reasoning suggest that only approximately one-third of eighth grade students can consistently demonstrate formal reasoning (Van Hoose and Strahan, 1988). This clearly emphasizes the importance of teachers giving careful consideration to the reasoning levels of students when planning instruction (Strahan & Toepfer, 1984).

Early adolescents do begin to think with greater logic and consistency. Those who have reached the formal stage of thought are still novices, however, when compared to later stages of development. Mitchell offers insight into the cognitive process in the following statement: "For the most part, early adolescents are exempt from thinking extensively about larger issues such as government, race or religion, and when they do think about these issues the reflections are essentially personal and immediate rather than abstract and general" (Mitchell, 1979, p. 20). This statement offers much to consider for educators and others involved in working with this age group.

Many early adolescents are still limited in their reasoning to immediate or past experiences and have difficulty with problems having more than two

simultaneous dimensions or relations. Others have negotiated the transition between the real and the impossible and are able to hypothesize contrary-to-fact possibilities (Baumrind, 1978; *Caught in the Middle*, 1987). As in other areas of early adolescent development, wide diversity exists and should be carefully considered when planning learning experiences.

Clearly the majority of middle level students are concrete learners. They learn by doing, trying out new ideas and sharing these ideas with peers and adults. Most are basically egocentric and have difficulty reasoning from points of view or experiences outside their own (Mallea, 1984). A major focus of middle level schools should be the provision of realistic learning expectations and experiences. When instruction is planned and implemented and is based on factual and complete understanding of the unique intellectual characteristics of these youngsters, many positive results emerge.

Social/Emotional Development

The comparative serenity of childhood is left behind during these years as emotions begin to play a key role in the life of early adolescents. They experience greater depth and breadth of emotions but the nature of these emotions more closely resembles those of childhood than those of late adolescence. Although these emotions are not always volatile, they can at times reach remarkable depths, e.g., jealousy, spite, envy. Emotions are more easily forgotten during this period, however, than in later years. They are not as expensive personally as those found in late adolescence and adulthood (Mitchell, 1979).

It is not uncommon for these youth to lose themselves in anger, love, fear, and other emotions as they experiment with the emergence of more adultlike feelings. They also become more idealistic and are frustrated when their ideals do not materialize. Early adolescents often criticize themselves and others unrealistically which may lead to feelings of uncertainty, anger, and frustration. Anger, though usually short lived, is common among this age group.

It is also during this stage that feelings about parents, teachers, peers, and others begin to undergo significant changes. Interpersonal relationships take on a new perspective as the peer group gains in importance and adults are looked at with a new perspective. This new perspective includes the recognition that even the most trusted and loved adults are not perfect and cannot always be depended on.

Learning to accept and be accepted by others is a vital task in early adolescence. Same-sex companionship is common during the 10th to 12th year with opposite-sex companionship coming in later development. Friendships that were more tentative in earlier years take on more solidarity during the middle years (Thornburg, 1980a).

Early adolescents are searching for self-identity amid confused sex-role models, a changing environment, and the impact of puberty. They experience not only exceptionally turbulent emotions, but a tremendous flexibility in self-concept (James, 1980). This flexibility of self-concept has numerous implications for teaching middle level students.

Fear, which often manifests itself in early adolescence, may emerge in the form of worries. Questions these youth may be dealing with include: Am I normal? Does anyone like me? What if I fail in school? What if I don't make the team? Fears related to areas such as death and religion are also sources of uncertainty. The fear of being ostracized or ridiculed by peers is a powerful force and at times yields such influence that early adolescents may compromise their own personal convictions rather than go against the peer group.

Conscience becomes more apparent during the period of early adolescence. Intense feelings about fairness, honesty, and values characterize this period. Morality is based more on what has been absorbed from the culture of the age group than from thoughtful meditation or reflection. The conscience is more pragmatic than ideal and more egocentric than altruistic. A primary social goal during this period is to learn the skills which achieve recognition and esteem from peers.

Early adolescents are easy to teach in some ways because they believe in the power of authority, their thought process is more geared to assimilate than to analyze, and they have limited ability to disagree with ideas beyond their range of experience.

Although the scope of this paper does not allow for full discussion of social and emotional development, it should remain paramount in the minds of all educators that these youth are experiencing important changes which have many implications for curriculum and instruction. Every attempt should be made to help these youngsters move successfully from the dependency of childhood to the relative independence of late adolescence and adulthood.

Conclusion

Less is known about the developmental stage of early adolescence than about any other time in life. Relatively little is known about the changing interactions of these youth in relation to their families, schools, peers, or communities (Lipsitz, 1980). Knowledge is increasing, however, and concentrated efforts should be made to learn more about the behavior of these youth and the root causes of that behavior.

Early adolescence is characterized by transition, but should not be viewed simply as a "transition." As noted by Lipsitz, "To see adolescence so exclusively as a transitional stage is to deny it the integrity we grant other stages of life. No large body of literature, for instance, refers to infancy or toddlerhood as transition" (Lipsitz, 1980, p. 22). The label transitional, if literally defined, may serve as a barrier against concentrated attempts to enhance a more complete and accurate understanding of this important period.

Early adolescence is a period when stress and other difficult experiences occur for large numbers of youngsters. Without doubt, these youth are facing problems that a few years ago were faced primarily by older youth. Despite these and other difficulties, it should be remembered that much joy is associated with the period of transition from childhood to adolescence and adulthood. It is a time filled with new and exciting events. It is also a time filled with many pleasures as physical growth offers many novel and intriguing experiences; as mental growth allows a more comprehensive view of the world; as social growth unveils the excitement of new peer relationships and new views of comradeship; and psychological growth allows the emergence of the recognition of self as a primary person, not just a reflection of the expectations of parents, teachers, and society (Mitchell, 1979).

In the remainder of this monograph, characteristics of effective middle grades teachers are examined and some selected instructional and curricular implications to be drawn from knowledge about this age group are presented. Those responsible for the education and welfare of early adolescents must possess a thorough understanding of the period if learning experiences consistent with early adolescent needs and interests are to become a reality.

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PART II

Characteristics of Effective Middle Grades Teachers

Working with early adolescents can be the most rewarding, challenging, and frustrating opportunity around. Endless student diversity can cause any teacher's most strongly held beliefs about education to waver and weaken. If there is ever an example of moment-to-moment decision making and thinking on one's feet, it must be in the middle grades.

What implications do the developmental needs and characteristics of early adolescents have for middle grades teachers? What personality traits, teaching styles, and instructional competencies predict the greatest likelihood of student success as well as teacher career satisfaction?

For middle grades teachers, an essential characteristic is a thorough knowledge of the human growth and development data pertinent to early adolescence. The seemingly pervasive turmoil that often accompanies this physical, social, and emotional development requires teacher understanding and accommodation. The transitional phase of intellectual development between concrete and formal operations requires teacher competence in content areas as well as considerable pedagogical diversity. The plaintive cry that seventh graders should act their age can most often be countered with the idea that they probably are.

Teachers who are unable or unwilling to accept and accommodate early adolescent behavior can create tremendous barriers to educational change in middle grades schools. This idea is bolstered by the results of ongoing efforts to determine to what degree schools have any real effect on students' learning. What is emerging is the idea that schools do make a difference. The school factors that have the greatest influence (independent of family background) are the teachers' characteristics rather than facilities or curriculum (Ravitch, 1981).

Too often in middle schools, especially those in transition from a previous grade pattern such as 7-9 or K-8, the major emphasis is on program change, staff reorganization, and facilities utilization. Too seldom is the major emphasis on teacher effectiveness and instructional improvement. In many instances teachers are ill-prepared by either preservice or inservice experiences to deal effectively with middle graders. Add to this lack of general preparation the necessity to accommodate mainstreamed, minority, at-risk and culturally diverse populations and one is immediately aware of the many potentially stressful and possibly self-defeating situations facing many teachers (Thompson, 1988). Perhaps teacher

characteristics leading to effectiveness should be a primary target of middle grades reforms.

From another perspective, one goal of middle level schools calls for educating early adolescents in stress-free climates. Unfortunately, this view may have caused some practitioners to embrace strong, child-centered programs which overlook the fact that the increasing maturation of youth in grades six through eight has many implications for more sophisticated strategies and expectations. It is possible to emphasize humanizing the curriculum, opening classrooms, and personalizing instruction to the exclusion of teaching fundamental skills and basic content adequately.

A more defensible position would be for middle grades teachers to provide programs which balance genuine efforts to accommodate diverse learning styles and abilities with society's expectations for basic skills development. Thus one major task is accepting the diverse needs and interests of early adolescence while at the same time providing a challenging, productive, and purposeful environment. This then necessitates that teachers be aware of their own behavior patterns, accept diversity in others, interact in meaningful ways with other adults as well as students, and provide consistent leadership models. Additionally, this more balanced approach necessitates that teachers competently manage the learning environment, increase quality learning time-on-task for all students, and indicate through planning and presentation a thorough knowledge of subject content.

Characteristics of Competent Teachers

Those characteristics always considered necessary for effective teaching have not changed with the advent of the middle school. Effective instructional techniques, classroom management strategies and content mastery remain quite basic. Perhaps because of the very traditional nature of these competencies however, they have received too little attention recently. In this highly complicated, technological age, simple statements may be ignored as common knowledge. Or, because of their very simplicity, they may be categorized as trite or "old hat."

To a considerable degree, effective middle grades practitioners have two strengths acting in tandem. First, they have a thorough knowledge of the developmental nature of early adolescents. Second, they have subject matter and instructional expertise. With these strengths, teachers can give greater attention to professional decisions, can balance teacher-directed and student initiated learning and have far fewer disciplinary disruptions because of their classroom management skills. Greater opportunities to actually teach and learn result.

Information gained from exemplary schools studies suggests that the most promising way to improve the teaching/learning climate in most schools is to

put the following principles to use (ASCD, 1981): First, teachers hold high expectations for student success. That is not to be confused with high standards which are also necessary but quite different in this context. High expectations for student success indicate that teachers are quite certain that all students will be able to meet or to exceed the standards and therefore to achieve success. High standards may only mean the misconception that raising the level of difficulty and being demanding indicates high expectations.

Effective middle level teachers also carefully monitor student progress in a frequent and effectual manner. This necessitates frequent changes in the instructional delivery system to insure that students are actually mastering the current content before proceeding to additional information. Materials of the appropriate level of difficulty, neither too hard nor too easy, may be included. Also, effective teachers maintain a classroom climate that is businesslike, with teacher-directed student activity and an achievement orientation. These teachers have a greater reliance on praise than criticism. They demonstrate good planning and effective classroom management which results in greater time-on-task and they guarantee that students have the opportunity to learn the expected content.

These teacher characteristics and expectations are in no way contrary to the developmental needs of early adolescents. Early adolescents need reliable, consistent role models and situations. Those who may be in need of remediation in basic subject areas are dependent on teacher selected and directed content experiences. None of the characteristics and behaviors discussed above are in conflict with humanistic concerns for a stress-free environment if teachers recognize the appropriate level of student sophistication and resulting strengths and limitations. Additional attention along this same line is needed for the exceptional learner and the culturally diverse population now constituting a majority rather than a minority in many middle schools.

Effective middle grades teachers are particularly careful to accept diverse populations without forming negative expectations based on appearance or preconception. These teachers learn as much as possible about the identification, characteristics and most beneficial approaches for these students. Resources, both in personnel and materials are investigated and their best application reviewed. Teachers prepare students within the classroom to accept and accommodate exceptional students; and additional planning results in the most beneficial grouping patterns within the classroom (George, 1988). As always, consistency in expectation and response is essential.

Leadership and Self-Esteem

Because of the predictably unpredictable nature of early adolescents, middle grades teachers should have strong self-concepts and present consistent, reliable

role models. During this time of increased stress and insecurity among students, youth look to adults who are in control of themselves, their lives and their work environment. Teachers who are effective in these areas demonstrate their competence by willingly taking risks, being receptive to new ideas, and by accepting new challenges. They seem less concerned with power and ego and manage classrooms without being overly controlling or rigid. They are genuinely sensitive to the feelings of others and flexible without appearing inconsistent and accepting without appearing unprincipled. They have the respect of students without being feared; and they have a pervasive sense of rightness about classroom procedures. Perhaps one of the most essential ingredients effective middle level teachers have is a healthy sense of humor.

Effective middle grades teachers have a thorough understanding of the principles of how human beings learn. They set realistic and appropriate goals and provide meaningful and immediate feedback. They incorporate more opportunities for students to be active learners and, in general, have more coherent, content presentations (McCormick, 1979).

In addition, assertive leadership and purposefulness are exemplified in a climate of high expectations where roles have been defined and expectations clearly stated. Teachers who establish themselves as respected classroom leaders encourage students to collaborate in becoming more involved in their own learning. Through demonstration and example, they show students how to take risks within the safe confines of the school environment. They and their students rise above any preconception of minimum levels of competence.

Classroom Management

Most educators would agree that one major cause of teacher failure is their inability to effectively discipline students and to control the learning environment. Many parents have demonstrated over the years, through vehicles such as the Gallup Poll, that discipline ranks quite high on their list of concerns about public schools (Twentieth Annual Gallup Poll, 1988). Add to this behaviors characteristic of early adolescents in terms of questioning adult authority and turning more to peers than to adults for encouragement and support, and classroom management clearly becomes a major issue for middle grades schools. Thus, while discipline may be an overly convenient scapegoat for other, less obvious problems, it is a significant factor in successful teaching.

Those teachers skilled in content planning and presentation have very few disciplinary interruptions. They recognize that when one does not manage well, disruptions occur more frequently and less time is devoted to teaching. Teachers who allow inappropriate socializing and who participate in these activities themselves promote an undisciplined classroom climate. Those who encourage distractions of any kind are weakening the standards that accompany a business-like atmosphere which seeks to provide greater time-on-task behaviors.

Effective teachers accommodate the early adolescent's concern with peer approval by arranging lessons which productively involve students in controlled social interaction while stressing the purposes and learning outcomes for the task. These teachers know that many disciplinary infractions occur because of an inadequate curriculum with inappropriate materials which cause student failure and result in negative self-concept and acting out behaviors. To counteract this, effective teachers motivate, reward, and assertively forestall disruptions by providing materials guaranteeing a high degree of student involvement and success.

In structuring appropriate activities, good middle grades teachers recognize and accommodate the need for peer recognition and approval. In addition, they recognize what might be an idealized self-image in the student. They plan activities which represent the anticipated level of sophistication appropriate for early adolescents. By being creative and sensitive, teachers can challenge with activities without defeating either purpose or student success.

To varying degrees, competent teachers provide a somewhat flexible classroom climate where students are encouraged to communicate with each other and to work in a relaxed manner. While these teachers may hold a strong, student-centered philosophy, they recognize that an overly permissive, out of control classroom will be negatively related to achievement (Rosenshine, 1979). The lack of rigorous expectations can result in a negative trend in creativity, inquiry skills, writing ability, and self-esteem. Any student of Maslow's hierarchy recognizes that while love needs are quite important, they rank below esteem needs. And while permissiveness may seem to say "I love you. Do what you wish," esteem needs are met by one's being successful and competent and measuring up to another's expectations and standards with recognition and reward.

Effective middle grades teachers accommodate this student-centeredness in defining their fundamental purposes and objectives. They recognize that students taught only by direct instruction may not be as imaginative, resourceful or self-confident as they otherwise might be. However, students taught in a chaotic atmosphere where anarchy reigns are unlikely to learn the essential skills of motivation and self-discipline. As with so many other areas in middle grades education, balance is always the key.

Finally, and perhaps most basically, effective teachers start class on time and are fully prepared for class. They have clearly defined standards for classroom conduct, formulate classroom rules with student input and accommodate the physical requirements of early adolescence. They consistently follow through on expectations, punishments, and rewards.

Teacher Directedness and Time-On-Task

Early adolescents become ever more sophisticated. So it is reasonable to expect them to take greater responsibility for much of their learning and to demand more input into its content and pace. However, teachers should not be unrealistic about the degree to which students, especially at this age, can manage their time, plan appropriate activities, learn independently, and critically evaluate their progress.

One characteristic of early adolescence is a great need for a very high success rate. This occurs at the very time that students are expected to master increasingly difficult content requiring higher level thinking skills. This, coupled with the fact that they have intense, though short-lived, interests in a wide variety of topics, results in the necessity to capitalize on both high success and higher level thinking factors to reach and encourage even the most recalcitrant learners.

Effective teachers use student interests and effective instructional techniques to provide a rapid but attainable pace. They also provide a supportive, interactive climate for their students. This helps promote an optimal mix of teacher-directedness and student-initiated learning.

Teachers with both a complete knowledge of the content and a variety of instructional strategies are more likely to make educational decisions which increase quality engaged time-on-task experiences. These teachers begin lesson planning with what they want to accomplish, i.e. learning outcomes and objectives, rather than with just what they are going to do. For example, effective teachers recognize that a lecture format to teach library skills will result in less active involvement for students than will the inquiry/discovery approach. Then, perhaps using a cooperative learning strategy, the teacher could structure interaction among students with varied levels of expertise in library techniques. This would ultimately result in differing learning outcomes based on students' various capabilities as well as guaranteeing involvement and planned success for each learner.

On the other side of the content versus developmental data controversy, there is this consideration. Teachers who have a thorough knowledge of the normal and expected behaviors of their clientele make sound educational decisions concerning the appropriate balance between teacher-directed and student-initiated activities. Overuse of teacher telling is as devastating to a well-rounded program as is allowing so many student-oriented electives that fundamentals are ignored and basic concepts go unlearned. Teachers should give students more freedom while at the same time specifying to what degree or in what respect they, the students, are responsible for the eventual outcomes.

It is widely recognized by those studying teacher behaviors and effective schools that direct instruction is beneficial for learning basic skills. Direct instruction is easier to plan and manage, provides modeling for correct thinking and avoids the elitism and labeling of many grouping strategies. Therefore, when learning objectives call for the acquisition of basic skills, utilizing teacher-directed instruction may be the most appropriate strategy. However, when learning has moved beyond fact or recall toward concept and evaluative learning, alternative and diverse methods are called for. Teachers hold the key to balancing the instructional program and thus the key to challenging students toward greater degrees of self-motivation and self-discipline.

The importance of constant teacher monitoring and immediate and meaningful feedback is very important in connection with student-directedness. Interestingly, frequent criticism as a means of feedback negatively affects achievement while enabling teacher responses have a positive effect. When the praise given is genuinely deserved, student self-esteem and, ultimately, achievement rise (Rosenshine, 1979).

In another slightly different context, effective teachers have a genuine enthusiasm for their subject as well as for the learning process. This encourages attention and promotes active interest. Enthusiasm here refers not merely to entertainment nor necessarily to showmanship, but to a great sense of commitment, excitement and involvement with the subject. When a teacher presents materials with gestures, animation and eye contact, students are more likely to pay attention and therefore to learn more (Cruikshank, 1980). When the teacher and the teaching fail to maintain the students' interest, a task growing ever more difficult considering the degree of media stimulation conditioning today's youth, it is no wonder that attention and learning decline.

In summary, effective middle grades teachers balance teacher-directed activities and content with student interests. They encourage more time-on-task. They oversee purposeful and well-managed classrooms by increasing contact with students and by becoming more involved with the students as they work. These teachers use direct questioning techniques to keep constantly aware of the level of student comprehension. They allow only very short time lapses between completion of work and return or evaluation of that work. Thus they better ensure mastery of the concepts and continuous progress toward learning outcomes and objectives. Effective teachers allow few interruptions in the class routine thus assuring adequate engaged time for students to learn the expected content.

In addition, they permit few disciplinary interruptions and permit little negative behavior to serve as distractions. They not only accept but accommodate the diversity within and among early adolescents. They recognize

and con[illegible]e for whatever learning or cultural diversities students within the classroom may have. They constantly work to reduce student dependence on the authority and direction of the teacher. And, perhaps most importantly, they provide a caring, consistent role model for students who are seeking stable, reliable adults with whom to interact.

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PART III

Implications for Instruction

Student diversity in both cognitive abilities and developmental needs has been discussed and the characteristics of effective teachers in terms of curriculum content knowledge and classroom management strategies have been presented. The crucial topic of instructional strategies which increase the likelihood of students learning content which is consistent with their developmental abilities is now considered.

The myriad patterns and rates of early adolescent development suggest a great need for multiple approaches to instruction. Paired with what is known about learning styles, evolving identities, and increasing levels of sophistication, the need to provide a great variety of learning opportunities while utilizing many different teaching techniques that recognize the developmental realities of early adolescence becomes a mandate.

While the idea of individualizing instruction to accommodate individual differences can cause any response from skepticism to outright rejection, the idea of using diverse techniques should connote something quite different. The suggestion that teachers should provide a different lesson plan or individual educational program for each student is not a popular one considering the number of student contacts facing the average middle grades teacher. However, the proposal that one can vary activities and objectives to both diversify presentations and compliment individual learning styles should get a warmer reception. Based on their preservice and inservice preparation, many teachers feel proficient with only a single style of teaching. Most frequently this style is the lecture-recitation format. Too often this delivery model is used to the exclusion of other more effective approaches. Teachers with large numbers of students and little time may retreat to this single preparation mode which is less time consuming and much simpler to deliver. Preparing one lecture to be given six times to 135 students is without question easier for teachers than preparing several formats of the same lesson. However, while this method facilitates the "teaching business," it is grossly mindless of the "learning business." Recent research on the consequences of different learning activities provides evidence that, when it comes to the average amount of retention, transfer and application, lecture results in only a five percent rate of learning. Interestingly, however, for those same consequences, discussion groups yield 50 percent and practice and real world application yield 75 percent. Teaching others yields as much as 90 percent retention (*North Carolina Effective Teaching Training Program*, 1985). Developmental research data of the last decade shows that early adolescents are quite likely the most diverse population being educated today. Simply in terms

of learning styles, it is known that some students are auditory learners, some visual, and many tactile-kinesthetic. Problems arise when learning expectations and outcomes are not reconciled with effective and efficient teaching/learning strategies. This section reemphasizes what has been discussed previously concerning developmental characteristics of early adolescents and characteristics of effective middle grades teachers. The focus from this point is on the implications of that information for practical, instructional strategies. To make this discussion more meaningful, a review of concrete and formal operations is provided, the developmental tasks most appropriate to this age level are discussed and the identity crises occurring during this period are investigated.

In each of these discussions, particular attention is paid to the belief that early adolescents do not fit into any single category or level, but span at least two, if not more, stages. For example, in social development, one cannot isolate only those tasks appropriate for middle childhood, because some early adolescents have passed through this stage and are more characteristic of the stage of adolescence. Emphasis is, therefore, placed on particular strategies, treatments, tasks, and implications for middle grades teachers working with this diverse student population in all subject areas.

Cognitive and Formal Operations

Much of what is done in schools to foster cognitive development has been based on the work of Jean Piaget (Inhelder, 1958). His theories on timing and developmental staging have been the cornerstone for curriculum development and instructional strategy selection. Textbooks have been written with what one would hope was a clear understanding of his theory and the resulting implications. However, trust that these textbooks are on target is not particularly well founded. Coupled with the fact that many teachers are so bound to textbook illustrations and sequence, these faulty middle school materials cause considerable difficulty. Some teachers confuse the process of extending the mental functions of students by overloading the present functions with too much information. This often results in a constant overloading with massive amounts of information with little interrelatedness or synthesis. Therefore, often a genuine increase in the diverse functions of the mind does not occur.

Examining concrete and formal operations indicates that early adolescents are usually not isolated in one stage or another, but are in transition (Thomason, 1989). Although many operate in the concrete domain, a few students at all times and many students at some times can function with formal logic. Students in this stage begin to think ever more logically but their thinking must be based, at lease initially, in the concrete rather than the abstract. Students can begin to perform simple operations of logic in the abstract and can do more advanced thinking if given physical objects to manipulate or basic ideas with which to work.

Based on early adolescent research of the last decade, it can be concluded that most middle grades students are concrete operational. They have reached the age at which they can begin to think ever more abstractly, but this does not mean that this new way of approaching thinking will automatically emerge. The progression toward more formal logic is not a spontaneous part of the maturation process; it must be encouraged, fostered, and its development overseen by a teacher who is competent in formal logic and equipped with techniques and strategies to aid student progress.

The goal here, beginning at ages 11-13 and continuing throughout life, is to develop the student's capacity to interpret symbols and deal with verbal ideas without having to manipulate physical objects. In other words, teachers should encourage students to be increasingly able to deal in abstract terms. To accommodate this view of learning, the role of the classroom teacher must shift dramatically from that of information giver to diagnostician, resource person, facilitator, and evaluator.

Effective middle grades teachers strive to increase the level of student reasoning by arranging teaching sequences beginning with concrete ideas explained through demonstrations, examples, and what have come to be known as "hands on" activities. (Formal definitions of these same ideas are presented later.) Time is then provided for students to explore the content by working directly with the materials as well as by working with other students. This gives students the opportunity to work with real objects, problems, situations or tasks. At the same time it allows them to ask their own questions and follow some of their own interests concerning content. It should be remembered that some students would rather be thought bad than be thought ignorant. Therefore, in a situation where the student might refuse to do the work rather than admit ignorance, if there is a peer to consult, there is a greater likelihood that progress can continue. Here too, students become aware of differing points of view coming from their peers rather than from the established source, the teacher.

Effective teachers who have begun class discussions with simple demonstrations and challenging tasks can then encourage students to ask exploratory questions or to predict outcomes. The questions which facilitate this type of thinking sound almost absurdly simple but are quite effective. One such question is "What if?" When students are encouraged to think of potential outcomes prompted by the question "What if?" is followed by "How do you know?" the substantiation of the response, known in more technical terms as metacognition, causes the student to select evidence to support the given answer. Then, when "Are you sure?" follows "How do you know?", students must justify responses and thus indicate command of both the question and the answer. Asking students to justify their own conclusions, predictions, and inferences, whether these are correct or incorrect further sophisticates the reasoning process.

Teachers working to have their students think at ever higher levels of sophistication try to be as receptive as possible to apparently "off-the-track" ideas. They do not reject timid first attempts but instead encourage this type of thinking by drawing attention to good or unusual points. While outright incorrect answers should not be supported, there is always the distinct possibility that a student response which appears to be far off base is simply a more creative way of looking at the question. Along this same line, effective teachers are willing to reason out loud and to illustrate a step by step reasoning pattern. They model the reasoning behavior desired in students (Thomason, 1982a).

Developmental Task Sequences

The work of Robert Havighurst (1953), though conducted some thirty years ago, is still quite valid for examining the social tasks of early adolescents today. He identified a series of developmental tasks, which must be experienced and completed for there to be satisfactory personality growth during various times of life. Understanding these tasks is necessary for teachers so lessons which accomplish the two-fold purposes of cognitive and personal development can be structured.

As with concrete and formal operations, early adolescents often span two developmental task groups. While many early maturing middle graders are already coping with the more sophisticated tasks of early adolescence, a significant number of "late bloomers" may well be just beginning to deal with the tasks of middle childhood. The teacher should therefore plan for both levels when designing learning experiences. Some examples of the tasks associated for this age group spanning two developmental stages follow.

Students at this age need experiences which build wholesome attitudes toward self as a growing organism. They need to learn to get along with age-mates and to manage appropriate masculine and feminine social roles. Practice in developing concepts and models necessary for mastering everyday living in our society and for developing socially responsible behavior is also needed. These youth need to respond to tasks which help them develop a conscience, morality, and a scale of values which will carry them successfully into adulthood.

Perhaps most importantly, students need activities and tasks which help them achieve personal independence, a recognized goal of early adolescence. They constantly strive to achieve personal independence from parents and other adults. Physically they need to participate in events which help them use their bodies effectively and to accept their own physiques. They can also participate in tasks which help them begin to select and prepare for an occupation.

Middle level teachers can accommodate these developmental task needs for all learners in any subject by incorporating the following kinds of techniques

into their instructional plans. For example, teachers can use cooperative learning and peer teaching to facilitate communication and promote emotional development with age mates. Perhaps no other age group can benefit more from the principles of cooperative learning and small group interaction than early adolescents (George, 1988). Also, teachers can invite community representatives who present non-stereotypic career role models to illustrate both a developing sense of masculine and feminine roles and occupational preparation. Effective teachers emphasize the use of reference skills and interdisciplinary studies to both remediate fundamental skills and encourage development of more advanced intellectual skills.

The literature on middle level education has long noted the importance of supporting and participating in some type of teacher-based advisory program. When students and teachers come to know each other on a personal, non-academic basis, the results include a more highly developed sense of responsibility for social groups and institutions as well as some mechanisms for coping with insecurities which result from a diminished reliance on parents and other adults. By encouraging students to discuss moral development issues relevant to them both as individuals and members of a larger community, teachers facilitate the development of a conscience and moral judgement. By fostering intramural programs in athletics and academics, teachers can help students understand and accept their physical and intellectual capacities without the debilitating strain of more advanced competition.

Recognizing the appropriate developmental tasks for each student as well as for each class or grade can greatly help teachers in at least two ways. First, they can capitalize on the more obvious tasks when planning instruction. If, indeed, working with age-mates is a primary task of middle graders, small group work, peer to peer, and group project activities should be an integral part of lesson planning. Also, teachers who are aware of the multiple developmental forces acting on early adolescents can more nearly come to accept what many others would view as radical or irresponsible behavior. This acceptance would then greatly benefit those teachers who are advisors to students in situations where students are more open and free with their opinions and concerns.

Identity Crises and the Development of Ego

The work of Erik Erikson (1963), though again some two decades old, still has a considerable number of implications for working with early adolescents. He proposed a personality model divided into eight stages: trust, autonomy, initiative, industry (accomplishment), identity, generativity, and integrity. He further suggested that these stages begin at birth and extend throughout life and that the successful accomplishment of each stage is necessary for success at succeeding stages.

While at least three and quite probably four of the stages occur prior to the middle grades, they are of considerable interest to those who work with early adolescents because the impact at any one stage may result in a major impact on the student. If a child has been subjected to the negative effects of these stages, namely mistrust, doubt, and guilt prior to early adolescence, there is a major task of remediation for an ego filled with personal guilt and doubt. When this happens, effective and savvy middle grades teachers can structure tasks to capitalize on autonomy and success and encourage initiative and self-assurance.

There are those who contend that the adult you grow into is the person who you basically were as an early adolescent. This contention is accurate to a considerable extent. So for those who work with early adolescents, the responsibility and opportunity for fostering a healthy and sufficient self-concept and sense of self is very important. Perhaps in no other area do teachers have the chance to make such a difference in someone's life outside of the influence of immediate families.

Of particular interest to middle grades teachers are the two stages of industry and identity. There is ample evidence that most early adolescents range between these two stages rather than being in one as distinct from the other. As with concrete and formal operations and the developmental tasks discussed earlier, the early adolescent period of ego development forms a bridge between childhood and adulthood and most early adolescents span at least two dimensions.

During early adolescence, students who operate primarily at the industry stage take great pleasure in what they perceive to be "real work" and the completion and results of each project. They require that tasks come to completion and that this accomplishment be recognized and in some way acknowledged with praise when that praise is genuine and merited. They can focus attention on tasks for extended periods of time and work diligently at tasks they view as relevant and for which they feel capable. Students at this stage (industry) undertake tasks for which there are obvious rewards such as merit badges, gold stars, or monetary prizes. This supports their growing need for independence and personal autonomy.

Effective middle grades teachers who understand these basic needs provide opportunities for reaffirming the positive results of prior stages of ego-development by creating opportunities and activities which have guaranteed success for each student. They praise and reward students with tangible measures which, while extrinsic in nature, satisfy the sense of accomplishment in a job well done. They promote a sense of optimism and creativity with learners displaying success in various ways. They also establish a pattern which capitalizes on industriousness by using project-oriented learning activities with

definite beginnings and endings, thus responding to this need to see tasks come to completion.

Subsequent to the industry stage comes that of identity development with all its ramifications for early adolescents. Much has been written about middle graders and their search for self. It is through a knowledge of this stage of ego development and proper attention to this information that teachers can make a significant difference with students. Accommodation of the needs of this stage results in healthy self concepts. Improper teacher expectations may cause such a sense of incompetence and unworthiness in early adolescents that the resulting role confusion is evidenced by delinquent behavior and attention commanding outbursts to get even simple recognition.

At this stage of identity versus role confusion, the teacher's task is somewhat confounded by the students' lessening dependence on all adults for reinforcement and reflection. Now the crucial questions center around what students think about themselves as well as what their peers think. Effective middle grades teachers, therefore, help foster healthy personalities for all students by providing opportunities to discuss confusion, dilemmas, and interpersonal issues related to one's proper role in society. Also they give attention to the early adolescent need to try out various roles and types of personalities until one is found which fits even when this may mean accepting what can appear as phony or unrealistic behavior. Teachers make accommodations for errors in judgment resulting from the general confusion present during this stage. They enhance positive evidences of a growing, maturing sense of self and are confidential with conversations about this growth and maturation. They plan learning opportunities to help in selecting a partner, career, or appropriate adventure. They are available to students for one-to-one conversations and provide reliable, consistent role models. They also demonstrate characteristics of a healthy personality by having themselves survived various ego-development stages and by being ready to proceed to the next.

Conclusion

Effective middle grades teachers rely on successful teaching experiences to increase the effectiveness of middle grades schools. They capitalize on the growing knowledge about and awareness of the developmental stages of early adolescents. By recognizing normal behaviors in their students, they enhance ego development. By providing appropriate experiences, teachers foster the accomplishment of developmental tasks. By carefully structuring lessons and other learning opportunities, they encourage thinking and cognitive development at ever higher functioning levels. Effective teachers understand and accept the experiences and expectations which are necessary to meet specific student needs. Effective teachers have at their command an arsenal of tools to capitalize on all sorts of student behavior. Effective teachers touch the future because they teach.

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